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New York

President: Mr. Essy ..... (Côte d'Ivoire)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Biegman (Netherlands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 4.40 p.m.

Agenda item 103 (*continued*)

Programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People: opening of the Decade

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/49/444, A/49/536)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/49/446)

Mr. Ole Ntimama (Kenya): I feel really honoured to have been given this opportunity to speak on behalf not only of my Government of Kenya but also of the indigenous people of Kenya and Africa in general.

This is a very important occasion, the inauguration of the International Decade for indigenous people. Only yesterday, the Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution on the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. I am sure that all indigenous people are grateful to this world body.

Again our gratitude goes to the United Nations for this resolution recognizing the plight of the indigenous people of the world. It is because of this resolution that the whole world has come to the realization that something must be done to save the indigenous people of the world from extinction and extermination.

The indigenous people of the world want to thank this world body again and the Secretary-General for creating an environment and atmosphere during the last 10 years which has made it possible for indigenous people to create a strong forum through which they have been able to highlight their problems to the whole world. I would like to thank the people working under the Secretary-General here at New York and Geneva and in all corners of the world who have devoted themselves to the general welfare and survival of the indigenous people of the world.

I would like, in particular, to pay tribute to those men and women who are working for the human rights of indigenous people. These great men and women not only have devoted their time and energies to preparing the ground for raising the awareness of indigenous people so that they can understand their human and other fundamental rights but also have created forums like the annual meetings of the Working Group and the technical committees which have given indigenous people the courage and stamina to stand up even against great odds.

I wish, however, to appeal to all men and women of goodwill to continue the struggle to save indigenous people from sliding into a dark and uncertain future. They need sympathy and moral and material support so that they can take their rightful place in the management of their own affairs in the world.

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This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Section, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum. When the result of a recorded and/or roll-call vote is followed by an asterisk, see annex to the record.

I would also like to thank those private and public organizations and non-governmental organizations that have assisted in the general development of indigenous people financially and materially. I would, however, implore them to continue helping in this noble crusade, which has a long way to go to reach its final destination, which is complete and guaranteed survival.

Because of these special efforts by the world body in addressing the plight of the indigenous people of the world, and the personal sacrifices of the devotees and activists of the indigenous people, it can now safely be said that the general consciousness and awareness of the indigenous people is at a very high level. I am certain, therefore, that this Decade ushers in a spirit of commitment on the part of the international community to organizing and educating indigenous communities at the grass-roots level to grasp the fundamental principle which dictates their survival and existence. We must not at any time during this long march lose track of our final goal, which is the survival of the indigenous people.

Save for the geographical, historical and psychological and cultural differences, the problems facing the indigenous communities of the world are the same. The Masai of East Africa have the same problems as the indigenous people of Mexico and the Ndorobo of Africa have the same problems as the indigenous people of Guatemala. All of them are struggling to survive against great odds. Indigenous people are normally dispossessed communities, people whose lands have been grabbed by colonizers or other adventurers. Indigenous people have been protectors and conservers of the general environment. They are the only people who have learned how to coexist with nature. Most of the rain and mist forest had been conserved for centuries by the indigenous peoples along with the crucial water catchments of the world. The big rain forests of South America and the Congo and the Mau forests in East Africa are typical examples of conservation and preservation by indigenous people. The wildlife of East Africa and southern Africa have been conserved and protected by indigenous people. Wildlife has been propping up the tourist industries of the world.

It is important for the world to appreciate the indigenous people for their guardianship of the total environment of the world. It is also important for the world to know that if the forest, the wildlife, and the fish are destroyed, and if the flow of life-giving water is interfered with, the indigenous people will be destroyed. And if the indigenous people and all that is dear to them are destroyed, then the world will also be destroyed. This is a message to the world: "Save the indigenous people and you will have saved the world. Destroy the indigenous people and you will have destroyed the world".

When people lose their land and are flushed out of their natural habitat — which means their natural wealth — they can have no hope of sustainable development, considering that land is the basis not only of their livelihood and survival but also of their economy. Our forests have been slashed and burned. Massive logging has destroyed the rain forest. Poachers have stolen our wildlife. Water sources have been destroyed. All this is done because of unlimited greed; sometimes it is done hypocritically in the name of development.

Culture, language and democratic traditions have also been destroyed all over, especially through the deliberate transfer of population to the territories of indigenous peoples. Sometimes, a large percentage of the population sent to those territories go as settlers and colonists. But some of them go as common loiterers who participate in drug abuse.

The Masai of East Africa can say that their pastoral tradition has been destroyed in that way because of the massive encroachment on their lands and territories. These massive transmigrations have created a situation where the land is fenced in small paddocks which interfere with the normal traditional flow of livestock and wildlife. Grazing is interfered with. Water sources and the pastoral tradition are destroyed. So is the existence of wildlife, which is a great heritage of the world.

The United Nations should continue to champion the rights of indigenous peoples, to restore their culture, wealth and dignity and to ensure their survival.

We hear of the new world order; we hear of the partnership for peace. It is now imperative also that the world attend to indigenous communities throughout the world and consider seriously supporting their development and progress. We demand therefore that the lands and territories of indigenous peoples be respected, not only to promote our economy and general welfare but also to ensure our survival. Our culture must be respected and allowed to flourish and reign within the preserves of indigenous populations. Cultural genocide must be halted. Our languages should be preserved and our children should be educated in accordance with the cultures and traditions of indigenous peoples. Our land should never again be stolen or grabbed.

I represent the Government of Kenya and the indigenous peoples of East Africa — the Ndorobo, the Kalenjin, the Rendille, the Somali, the Borana, the Oromo, the Pokot and many others. Our cry is "We must survive".

It is gratifying to be able to confirm here that the Government of His Excellency President Daniel Arap Moi protects and fully recognizes the fundamental human rights of all the people of Kenya. In particular, his Government is addressing the rights of vulnerable groups such as indigenous peoples and pastoralists with a view to integrating them into the economic, political and social mainstream of Kenya, with the rest of the people.

Mr. Samana (Papua New Guinea): It is an honour and pleasure for me to take this opportunity to state the views of my delegation on the important occasion of our commemoration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Indigenous people are the autochthonous or aboriginal peoples of the land and are found in many parts of the world. From one angle of history, indigenous peoples can be considered to be pioneers and the discoverers of new lands. They were the first to colonize wild habitats and develop agriculture, and they established the first settlements in the history of human migration.

Today, throughout the world, indigenous peoples continue to struggle to regain their rights to their land, to maintain their identity and to safeguard the continuity of their basic means of sustenance.

The current socio-economic predicament of indigenous peoples is a direct result of the barbaric militarism and hegemonic expansionism of the last 200 years, including colonialism. Many indigenous people are driven out of their lands, pushed to the periphery or completely wiped out in the onslaught of domineering migrants who happen to possess superior technology and better organizational skills. The imposition of new laws governing land tenure and the introduction of new modes of economic production have resulted in the further socio-economic marginalization of indigenous peoples. As entrenched minorities, indigenous peoples continue to be victims of racial, religious and social prejudice. The loss of autonomy and self-respect has in some cases led to increased anti-social behaviour among the dispossessed minorities, a symptom of human withdrawal and of the rejection of domination.

Having noted with grave concern the plight of indigenous peoples, my delegation applauds the international community for the Assembly's timely consideration of their situation. Having recognized the particular contribution of indigenous peoples to the development of human civilization through agriculture, and having recognized also their right to exist as peoples, the international community should now call on States Members of the United Nations to undertake the necessary legislative changes, with respect in particular to matters of land tenure, as a means of providing indigenous peoples with some degree of cultural autonomy and rights of usage of their traditional land resources; this is relevant for their survival and their long-term development.

Due regard must also be given to the right of indigenous peoples to participate fully in the social, economic and political life of the nation within which they are found. The international community should further encourage the maintenance of their identity, culture and language and give adequate support to training and education to empower them to enjoy the benefits of modern technology and economy as equal citizens.

At this juncture in human history we cannot claim to have attained a higher status of civilization or modernity so long as human prejudice exists, whether on the basis of colour, income or creed. We therefore note with much satisfaction that many countries have improved their efforts to recognize the rights of indigenous people. Within our South Pacific region, my delegation wishes to compliment the New Zealand Government for its positive effort in recognizing the land rights of the indigenous Maori people and for its supportive policies that seek to provide access for smaller Pacific communities to the benefits of its social amenities. We also recognize the positive outcome of the Australian Supreme Court decision on the historic Marbo land case, which for the first time in history recognizes the land rights of the aboriginal people. We hope that positive moves such as these can be emulated to give further recognition to other peoples throughout the world.

The indigenous peoples of the world have played a custodial role in sustaining the world's biodiversity, through which we can all benefit from the use of genetic resources for food and agricultural development.

The skills of the indigenous people and their local knowledge of flora and fauna represent a source of new knowledge of medicinal herbs and plants that offers a

number of opportunities for the development of pharmaceutical products.

The knowledge of indigenous technology, unique art forms and music and traditional values, offers ethical inspiration and the challenge of an alternative world view that seeks to maintain social harmony and harmony with nature.

Despite the benefits of modern science and technology, my delegation takes particular note of the obvious negative impact on societal stability, such as the frequency of family breakdowns, the increasing number of homeless single families and the abuse of children, and psychological breakdowns.

In the context of many developing countries, while social transition has been traumatic in human terms, studies have shown greater signs of resilience and a higher degree of adaptability among communities that are socially bonded together through kinship than among those who are cut off totally from their extended families.

Whatever the socio-economic situation, the convivial lifestyle of the indigenous people provides inner strength and comfort for its members.

For example, so long as the extended family system exists, Governments in many developing countries do not have to bother to maintain social welfare programmes that are proving to be detrimental to the people concerned and becoming an unbearable economic cost to the State.

We share the view with others that land alienation and lack of development have a direct correlation to rural-urban migration and the creation of poverty. On the basis of this assumption, we believe that by empowering the deprived sectors of our communities, be they women, indigenous minorities, or the poor, through the development of their productive potentials and by promoting their direct engagement in socio-economic activities, we would go a long way towards improving the quality of life of our citizens, and attaining Governments' overall macroeconomic policy goals of population stabilization and sustainable development in a comprehensive manner.

At this juncture, I wish to draw some lessons from the experiences of my own country on this subject of the rights of indigenous minorities. Papua New Guinea is a country composed of thousands of ethnicities. Ours is a nation of indigenous minorities exemplified by 900 different and distinct linguistic groups. Populations of each of these different groups range between 500 to 10,000 people living in isolated communities. These ethnic groups collectively own through their clan system 97 per cent of the land resources in Papua New Guinea.

Thus, in Papua New Guinea, references to indigenous people and landowners are interchangeable. A particular context is therefore provided in which Government and people can relate in such a way that the people's rights are constitutionally protected. In recognizing the diversities of our communities, the constitution of Papua New Guinea allows for the direct participation of our people in political decision-making and delegates governmental and administrative responsibilities through a decentralized form of Government that embraces the different villages, districts and provinces. By giving constitutional recognition and encouraging participation, Papua New Guinea is able to maintain its unity through diversity.

Consistent with its constitutional provisions, Papua New Guinea's mining, fisheries and forestry policies and legislation allow for the direct participation of landowners in negotiations that determine the terms and conditions for natural resource development.

In this case, the rights and the interest of the indigenous people are not negated. The State, while protecting the collective interest of citizens, takes a conciliatory role in assisting the landowners and the investors to come to terms and strike an amicable development proposal that meets the mutual interest of parties involved, that is, the people, the State and the investors.

However, it is noted that in some cases the extension of indigenous rights beyond the parameters of accepted legal norms can give rise to serious problems in the maintenance of national consensus and cohesion. For example, land compensation claims and negotiations on resource development can be a drain on limited financial resources, and continuous delay can also create costs for the Government, the people and the investors.

Our direct experience prompts us to caution those who, in the name of protecting fundamental human rights, seek to subtly enforce their will and perceptions on other peoples and countries, without seriously considering the particular situations confronting these countries, and also without appreciating the limit to which ethnic interests can be pursued.

Ours is a situation of reaching a delicate balance between the need to protect the rights and interests of landowners on the one hand and the need to distribute the benefits of resource development nationally. This must be done within acceptable constitutional and legal parameters, while achieving mutual economic gain and maintaining peaceful coexistence.

The initial consultative process needs painstaking efforts, which require ingenuity and, above all, patience and the mastery of human relations.

While we endeavour to establish the legitimacy of national institutions and acceptance of national values, we realize, however, that the unreasonable pursuit of individual rights and ethnic interests can adversely affect social stability and, if not handled sensibly, could eventually undermine the constitutional authority of the Government.

Concurrently, the recognition of the landowners as a legitimate social, political and corporate entity and their direct engagement in negotiations on major resource developments has, in most cases in Papua New Guinea, proved to be a very successful exercise in reaching sensible commercial decisions, especially when the parties involved are given proper and fair treatment in the first instance. Papua New Guinea's initiatives in undertaking legislative and constitutional changes to allow for the participation of landowners in the process of decision-making with respect to commercial negotiations and giving them the option to become stockholders in corporate entities engaged in resource development sectors have been regarded by some as a unique innovation in public policy-making.

The basic laws of our country, which are represented by the customary legal norms, affirm the autonomy and the rights of clans as having custodial responsibilities over resources collectively owned, of which land is the most important. Therefore, State policies and efforts to establish modern economic arrangements must be relevant and acceptable to the needs of the people, and not the reverse.

We offer this experience as an option for a genuine people-centred development model for further scrutiny and improvement by the international community, as we consider policy alternatives and appropriate programmes that would facilitate the recognition of the rights and dignity of the indigenous peoples of the world.

In welcoming the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, Papua New Guinea stands ready to participate fully in the activities and programmes that are designed to promote such a noble course.

In so doing, we strongly recommend that the activities and programmes for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, to be carried out by various Governments, be closely coordinated and integrated with the other activities and programmes of the United Nations relating to existing Declarations such as the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, as contained in General Assembly resolution 1541 (XV) and resolution 1654 (XVI); the International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism by the Year 2000; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with specific reference to the rights of peoples to self-determination.

The comprehensive and coordinated implementation of these Declarations would further enhance our efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions and opportunities for the indigenous people.

Finally, Papua New Guinea pledges its fullest cooperation and support in partnership with the rest of world in achieving the goals of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Mr. Vilchez Asher (Nicaragua) (*interpretation from Spanish*): We are very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the programme of activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, as well as in the inauguration of the Decade.

It is a source of special satisfaction for me to be able to address this General Assembly on this occasion on behalf of the Government and the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua, a nation that is multi-ethnic, multilingual and pluricultural.

In addition, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for the report and the note contained in documents A/49/444 and A/49/446.

Reaffirming its commitment to full respect for human rights and in favour of the economic, social and cultural development of the indigenous peoples of our country, the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, Mrs. Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, under the authority conferred upon her by our political constitution, has established the National Committee for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, which will be acting with the support of the presidency of the Republic.

The Committee, which is open to participation, has been entrusted with promoting programmes and projects for the indigenous peoples and communities of the country, in the framework of the activities of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People and the programme of action to be adopted for this purpose.

Taking into account the importance of the subject and my Government's commitment to the Decade, the Committee will be composed, at the highest level, of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Social Action, Labour, Health, Environment and Natural Resources; the directors of the Nicaraguan Institute of Agrarian Reform and the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture; a representative of the institutions of higher education of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic; and five representatives of organizations of indigenous peoples and communities.

At the same time, an invitation to participate in the Committee will be extended to the coordinators or governors of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Atlantic and to a member of the Commission of Ethnic Affairs of the National Legislative Assembly.

Among the main objectives of the Nicaraguan Committee for the Decade are the following: to elaborate and implement a programme of action for the Decade, with the purpose of strengthening relations with the indigenous peoples and communities of the country; to develop proposals for national policies for the demarcation and legalization of lands and to provide services in the fields of health, education, employment, technical assistance, protection of the traditional economy and sustainable development for indigenous peoples; and to promote the coordination and/or participation of the Government, the indigenous peoples and communities, together with national or foreign non-governmental organizations and international institutions interested in indigenous affairs and the effort to help resolve the problems confronting the indigenous peoples in the spheres of human rights, environment, development, education and health.

Other objectives of the Committee include following up the implementation of Government policies, programmes, projects and activities together with the indigenous populations of the country; the planning and implementation of national activities for the Decade; compiling, documenting and publishing, with the support of the Nicaraguan Government, friendly Governments and/or international organizations, scientific and literary materials on the indigenous populations of the country and on the global indigenous problem as a whole; and administering technical and financial resources to support projects and programmes aimed at the well-being of indigenous peoples and communities.

Together with the efforts being made by our people and governmental leaders to celebrate the United Nations Decade of the World's Indigenous People and to implement the various initiatives, we attach the utmost importance to the establishment of a Voluntary Fund for the Decade, which will be able to give support not only the various initiatives of the indigenous population in the area of human rights but also the technical assistance projects requested by these peoples.

We also attach the utmost importance to the establishment of a special grant programme for the indigenous populations, separate from the one already existing in the area of advisory services and as a complement to it. A programme of this type would provide cost-of-living subsidies to members of indigenous populations for a period of more than six months so that they can work with the Coordinator of the Decade. This programme could also be extended to other spheres of competence of the United Nations, so that the indigenous populations, and particularly those in the developing countries, can contribute with their experience to the work of the United Nations and obtain direct knowledge of the Organization.

We believe that the launching of the Decade is also an excellent opportunity for development banks such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Populations of Latin America and the Caribbean and other regional or national banks and non-governmental organizations to consider the possibility of channelling resources towards indigenous beneficiaries. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) should study concrete ways in which the programme could help indigenous women, above all taking into account the fact that in the draft programme of action for the Decade, one of the principal topics is the promotion of social development and the strengthening of the role of indigenous women.

We are certain that during the course of this Decade of the World's Indigenous peoples, it will be possible, through the programme of action of the Decade and the work of the national committees, to seek a united path in support of the broad range of issues that form part of the indigenous question - a meeting ground for complementarity among different worlds.

The Decade constitutes universal recognition of the defence of indigenous theory and practice, the promotion and defence of the human rights of the indigenous populations, and of progress towards attaining the platforms of indigenous organizations, and demonstrates the urgent need to eliminate once and for all the oppression and discrimination that have for centuries affected many peoples. The Decade also means a steady transformation of our nations towards the future in order to creatively embrace diversity and, on this basis, to build or strengthen unity and, of course, the progress of law and of the State codifies it.

The Decade, the logical continuation of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, is also an excellent opportunity to mobilize international cooperation in order to improve the economic and social conditions of the indigenous peoples of the world. In the specific case of Nicaragua — taking into account the role that the indigenous peoples have played in the political life of the country and in bringing peace, stability and governability to our nation — sustained support for their plans, projects and programmes for socio-economic development on a sustainable basis would clearly help to consolidate the process of peace, to create greater political and economic stability and further strengthen democracy and governability. The Nicaraguan indigenous peoples have not only contributed effectively to the process leading to peace, freedom and democracy, but are also still participating in national efforts at reconciliation, democratization and economic and social development. They are also participating in the central Government at high levels and in the autonomous administrations of our country.

May I say how pleased my delegation is at the appointment of the Under-Secretary-General for Human Rights as Coordinator for the Decade. We believe that the promotion of human rights and sustainable development should be a constant priority throughout the activities of the Decade. In this context, important initiatives should be taken to see to it that the economic and social development needs of the indigenous peoples are given special and priority attention.

We share the opinion expressed by some delegations that indigenous issues should be incorporated for consideration in the preparatory work for the holding of the World Summit for Social Development and on the agenda of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

I also wish to express my Government's appreciation of the important role that has been played by the United Nations system, including the role of the United Nations Development Programme, in preparing the activities of the Decade. We appeal to all the agencies of the system to consider creative and innovative mechanisms to involve more broadly indigenous organizations and peoples in the activities of the Decade.

We are convinced that the Decade represents a rediscovery of our identity, and this means not only identifying the roots of the past but also means looking to the future. It thus means a reaffirmation of the origins of our peoples and cultures and a challenge which should always be present in the efforts that we make for unity and integration of our peoples and nations.

Let us make the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People a productive reality. Let us see to it that this event does not go by as just one among others. Let each of us become a transmitter of the strength of the hundreds of millions of indigenous people the world over — their spirit of survival, their reality and, above all, their hopes.

Mr. Larrain (Chile) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: It is an honour and a source of satisfaction for me to speak on this occasion in celebration of this significant event, which inaugurates the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

The recommendation of the World Conference on Human Rights for the proclamation of an International Decade of the World's Indigenous People begins a new stage in the life of the international community, in which we seek to recognize the contribution that indigenous peoples can make within the United Nations in the economic, social and cultural spheres. This is part of a widespread trend in contemporary social systems towards respect for cultural diversity, recognized as a factor of cooperation and understanding.

In my country, with the restoration of democracy, the traditional policy of cultural assimilation is beginning to be replaced by one of full respect for the identity of the indigenous peoples with a view to achieving their authentic integration into the Chilean nation. In this context, a special commission of indigenous peoples has been established. The purpose of this body is to secure the active involvement of these peoples in the study of policies that affect them within the diversity of Chilean society. Thus, with the close participation of the

indigenous peoples, a new law has been drafted. This law recognizes the right of the indigenous peoples to maintain and develop their own cultural characteristics and imposes on the State a duty to promote these as a part of the nation's heritage.

In this context of participation at the national level, we wish to point out that the draft declaration on the rights of the indigenous peoples that was adopted by the Subcommission on the Prevention of Discrimination and the Protection of Minorities will be the subject of consultations between the various sectors of our society, including the indigenous peoples, with a view to future consideration of this subject by the Commission on Human Rights.

We believe that the present stage of the debate on the indigenous peoples should provide a frame of reference for an institutional and programmatic review, within the United Nations system, of the problems confronting these peoples. In this context, it is Chile's express wish that the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People be a functional and not merely a declarative initiative, thus responding to the aspirations of millions of indigenous people who, historically, have constituted the most marginalized sector of society.

For this reason, we are extremely interested in seeing the establishment of a permanent forum for the indigenous populations to make possible a dialogue among the various players in international society. Furthermore, we support the idea that the programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system should incorporate the question of indigenousness in a more definitive way. In this respect, we value the work that is being done by the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization.

In a different context, we support the idea of having the United Nations University consider the possibility of sponsoring, in each region, one or more institutions of higher learning as centres of specialized knowledge in this field to support the indigenous populations and help them to find appropriate solutions to their problems. We also believe that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the discharge of his functions, should consider the special interests of the indigenous populations and the objectives of the Decade and that a Unit of the Centre for Human Rights should be enhanced to deal with these matters.

Mr. Vilchez Asher (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We also want to express our hope that the Decade will help to eliminate any form of racial discrimination against indigenous populations. The traumatic experiences deriving from ethnic problems in today's world should inspire within the Organization condemnation of any expression of racism and xenophobia.

Finally, I should like to declare my country's aspiration that at the end of the Decade we shall be able to say with pride, as we look back, that in the international community there is greater recognition of the right to diversity, clearer recognition of the contribution of the indigenous peoples to the values and cultures of contemporary societies and greater respect for the immense human riches that come from those who, before anyone else, ruled our Earth.

Mr. Insanally (Guyana): One year after we observed the International Year of the World's Indigenous People we meet again today for the inauguration of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. As we are all aware, the Decade is being launched as part of an ongoing process to promote awareness of the rights of indigenous people, as well as national and international actions to satisfy these rights.

Indigenous people occupy a special position in contemporary society. Many have suffered severely as a direct consequence of a cruel colonization that brought untold misery to their lives. Not only were their numbers decimated, but their culture and way of life were ravaged also. Most of the difficulties that they face today necessitate long-term investment in education, training and infrastructure, the benefits of which cannot be expected to be felt for many years. The Decade is therefore an opportunity for the international community to pay increased attention to indigenous people and to work for solutions to their problems. It is an opportunity that the United Nations must pursue fully.

It is gratifying to note that since the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations in 1982 considerable progress has been made in the promotion of the interests and rights of indigenous people internationally. Over the past few years in particular we have witnessed with satisfaction the increasing momentum of international activities in relation to indigenous people. The proclamation, in General Assembly resolution 48/163 of 21 December 1993, of the

International Decade commencing on 10 December 1994 therefore marks a high point in this very positive trend.

The International Year of the World's Indigenous People in 1993 served effectively to lay some of the groundwork for the planning of the International Decade. The adoption of the theme for that year, "Indigenous people — a new partnership", was a timely recognition of the importance of working in close collaboration with indigenous people in order to build meaningful relationships on the basis of equality and mutual respect to achieve the objectives of the Year. Quite rightly, the theme now adopted for the Decade, "Indigenous people — partnership in action", places the emphasis on action-oriented measures to benefit indigenous people for the rest of this century and beyond.

According to the Coordinator of the International Year, in his final report, positive results have emerged from the Year's programme of activities aimed at strengthening international cooperation for the solution of problems confronting indigenous peoples in the areas of development, environment, health, education and human rights. The spirit of cooperation which has prevailed engenders new global understanding of indigenous issues, resulting in concerted efforts to protect and promote the rights of indigenous people. This, I believe, augurs well for our future efforts.

The Decade will need to build on this foundation with the lessons we have learned during the Year uppermost in our minds. One major lesson is that much more remains to be done to produce significant and substantive results of enduring benefit to our indigenous people. Another is that lasting results cannot be achieved without careful planning, coordination and implementation involving Governments, United Nations agencies and indigenous peoples, working in close consultation with each other. The success of the Decade depends on further developing the partnerships that have been forged thus far.

We in Guyana have already begun to implement many of the proposals advanced by the Secretary-General in the interest of our own indigenous peoples. Our experience has taught us that an outreach programme will be successful only if it is based on dialogue with the peoples concerned. Policy decisions which may impact on their communities and lives should be worked out through consultation with them at various governmental and non-governmental organizational levels. Through interaction based on this approach, a genuine partnership can be developed on the basis of mutual trust.

Mindful of this, Guyana remains fully committed to involving our indigenous communities in the promotion of their welfare. We are sensitive to the need for an integrated policy aimed at promoting their education, health, development, language and culture. We listen and act on their concerns as expressed through their representative councils. Today, our Constitution enshrines their fundamental rights and protects their titles to lands which their ancestors traditionally occupied. Our Amerindians are represented in Parliament, where they can fully voice their concerns. Recently, a select Parliamentary Committee comprising members of all political parties was appointed to review the Amerindian Act and make recommendations for appropriate amendments.

A Ministry for Amerindian Affairs was established by the Government in late 1992 to deal with the welfare of our indigenous communities. The Minister for Amerindian Affairs, who is himself an Amerindian, travels regularly within our vast countryside to meet with the Amerindian communities and to ensure that their welfare is amply protected. The principle of consultation and collaborztion between Government and the indigenous population is thus well entrenched.

The Ministry for Amerindian Affairs also works in close collaboration with other service Ministries, including Education and Cultural Development, Health, Public Works, Communications and Regional Development, Finance, Labour, Human Services and Social Security, to ensure that the interests of the Amerindian people are integrated into various policies, programmes and objectives that may affect their lives. Moreover, there are also various non-governmental organizations, including very importantly the business sector, that work together to promote their interests and concerns.

The Iwokrama Rainforest Programme, to which the Government of Guyana has devoted almost 1 million acres of pristine rain forest for research into our rich biodiversity, also incorporates two projects involving our Amerindian people. This is tangible acknowledgement that there is much to be learned from the Amerindians' intimate knowledge of the rain forest and the invaluable medicinal properties of its vegetation. The Amerindians have a sacred respect for the environment and can therefore teach the international community about its sustainable management.

At the international level, and more particularly here at the United Nations, we have noted with some interest the efforts under way, particularly those of the United Nations Development Programme, to revive trade between indigenous peoples in order to promote their economic growth and increase intra-indigenous cooperation. The exchange of goods and ideas among indigenous peoples, especially between North and South, can serve, if properly oriented, to enhance the economic and social development of indigenous peoples. The promotion of traditional products and crafts may also enhance their cultural development. The Government of Guyana is willing to support such ventures and urges the international community to render every assistance to ensure their success.

As we begin the commemoration of this Decade, we must work towards the early adoption of the draft programme of activities. Guyana welcomes the useful work done on planning these activities by the Technical Meeting held in Geneva in July this year and by the meeting of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations. At both these meetings representatives of indigenous peoples pronounced themselves on the Decade and its objectives. The draft programme which has emerged from those consultations will require further elaboration and consideration by the Commission on Human Rights in 1995 so that it can be adopted by the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. We would hope that in the final document ample provision will be made for periodic reviews of the programme's activities to ensure that they are proceeding as we intend.

Apart from effective planning and co-ordination, it will also be necessary for adequate resources to be made available for projects at the international, regional and national levels. Our Government therefore urges other Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the private sector to contribute generously to the Voluntary Fund for the Decade, which we hope will be established by the Secretary-General in 1995.

In addition to resources for the Voluntary Fund, it is important that adequate human and financial resources be made available to the Centre for Human Rights in support of its activities. This is vital, since the Centre for Human Rights will have a key role to play in the elaboration of the Year's activities. It is to be hoped that the necessary additional resources will be made available from the regular budget of the United Nations.

Finally, it is our view that activities of the programme for the Decade should revolve very closely around the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We would therefore urge that the consideration of the draft be as expeditious as possible to allow for its adoption. Guyana stands ready to join the rest of the international community to translate this draft declaration, as well as the programme of activities as a whole, into meaningful action on behalf of indigenous peoples everywhere.

Mr. Abdellah (Tunisia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mrs. Gayer (Russian Federation) *(interpretation from Russian)*: I have the great honour of conveying to the General Assembly the warm greetings and the good wishes of the small indigenous peoples of Russia in connection with the proclamation of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. Today's ceremonial meeting of the General Assembly is simultaneously a celebration and the occasion for an account of the efforts of the world community during the first International Year of the World's Indigenous People.

In February 1992, when the International Decade was proclaimed, we said that a year was not sufficient to deal with the problems of indigenous people. After two years, we realize that it will probably take more than a decade to solve all these problems. It has to be acknowledged that, in the past, the Governments of most countries limited themselves to insignificant hand-outs to small peoples. These peoples were given no assistance to enable them to establish their cultures, to revive and preserve their traditions or to achieve economic improvement.

A decision of the Government of the Russian Federation resulted in the establishment of a national organizational committee to prepare for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. This committee is headed by a deputy chairman of the Government and includes representatives of virtually all ministries and agencies, deputies from the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and from local government bodies, representatives of the indigenous peoples of the north of Siberia and the Far East and representatives of aboriginal organizations.

Bearing in mind the purposes of the United Nations in initiating the International Decade — the strengthening of international cooperation towards resolving the

problems of indigenous peoples in respect of such matters as human rights, the environment, development, education and health care — the Russian Federation is preparing a national programme for the Decade. Following discussion and approval, this will be presented to the United Nations and conveyed to the representatives of the indigenous peoples of Russia.

In the Russian Federation much remains to be done, primarily in the area of legislation, as part of the endeavour of the Decade. I refer to the amendment of domestic legislation to make it conform to international standards relating to indigenous peoples. There is still much work to be done to secure practical improvement of the social and economic position of aboriginal and small peoples in our country. A great deal remains to be learned with regard to all aspects of the cultures of our indigenous peoples.

In 1993 — the international year for indigenous peoples in Russia — expeditions were dispatched to various regions of indigenous peoples to gather information about medicinal plants. We expect this work to continue. A "Red Book" on the indigenous peoples of Russia has been published, and there will be a similar publication on their languages. These two books will disclose what is happening to peoples that are dying out.

In November of this year the Russian Parliament arranged hearings on Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation, which is entitled "Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries". It was decided to accede, stage by stage, to that Convention — beginning with the amendment of our domestic legislation to make it conform.

The standard of living of the small peoples of the Russian north lags substantially behind average indicators in the country. An absolute majority of the aboriginal population live below the poverty line. The unsatisfactory situation in respect of the entire social infrastructure and the deteriorating environmental situation have resulted in high morbidity and mortality rates among these peoples.

As we move to a market economy and as the development of natural resources for industrial purposes progresses, these processes could take a disastrous turn. We are witnessing the revival of colonial methods of exploiting natural resources. More and more of the added value generated by indigenous people is being taken away from them. In view of the fact that property and land reform is being carried out without consideration of the specific regional ethnic qualities of northern people, it is possible that social tension will increase.

I remember a time, years ago, when we the small indigenous peoples living the Soviet Union, believed that we were better off, in all respects, than other aboriginal peoples in all other parts of the world. But then we saw the drafting of a declaration of the human rights of indigenous peoples. Only as recently as 1990 did we, the representatives of the small indigenous peoples of our country, begin to be a part of the international community. We started to participate in United Nations groups concerned with indigenous peoples.

Members of the General Assembly have taken an interest in our problems. Thus, we pay the highest tribute and extend the deepest thanks to Mrs. Erika Daes for all that she has done on behalf of indigenous peoples, including her work on the draft declaration on their human rights, which we hope the General Assembly will adopt.

Experts in the working group commented on the importance to indigenous peoples in the Russian Federation of the Russian programme for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This work requires the support of the entire United Nations system.

A problem that is of great importance to us is that of the environment. It affects all territories inhabited by indigenous peoples. Protection of the environment requires the assistance of the United Nations Environment Programme. The experience gained from the International Year of the World's Indigenous People indicates clearly that solutions to these problems will require political resources and political will.

The General Assembly, quite rightly, took the initiative of establishing a voluntary fund for the International Decade. It is appealing for contributions not only from Governments but also from the organizations of the indigenous peoples themselves and from various private institutions and individuals. This is a matter to which we want to draw special attention. We should like to express some ideas about the possible operation of such a voluntary fund.

The process of structuring the fund should include consultations with analogous funds in the field for the purpose of coordinating activities.

These regional and national funds could provide the basis for activities to be undertaken in their own regions and countries. A very careful approach will be needed when selecting members of the Board of Trustees for the Voluntary Fund from among the representatives of the indigenous people.

We also support the programme of action that the United Nations Secretariat has prepared for the International Decade. The programme will no doubt become the basis for relevant national programmes to improve the living conditions of indigenous people.

The International Year of the World's Indigenous People has energized the indigenous peoples' movement in Russia. The International Decade could appropriately be named, as was proposed by Rigoberta Menchú, the Decade for the Human Rights of Indigenous People, which will lead to a comprehensive and just rebirth of our peoples.

Our homeland, Russia, is large; it comprises many small peoples, and so only one or two individuals cannot represent them at international conferences and forums. But their appropriate representation is becoming possible now that the United Nations has proclaimed the Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Our delegation includes deputies from Parliament and from the Duma, as well as 11 representatives of indigenous peoples' associations. Some of these representatives are here with us today, and I am very happy that we could be present at such a special day as the proclamation of the Decade.

Mr. Florencio (Brazil): The launching of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, set to begin on 10 December 1994, constitutes yet another important initiative of the United Nations aimed at promoting and protecting indigenous people, a group which, in most cases, finds itself in adverse and vulnerable situations.

The International Decade seems timely and appropriate, as it follows the International Year. It is particularly encouraging that, pursuant to resolution 48/163, the Decade places the necessary emphasis on the strengthening of international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous peoples in areas such as human rights, the environment, development, education and health.

Throughout the Decade, the international community will have the opportunity of dealing with the many complex matters that indigenous people must face. It is our earnest hope that in the next 10 years we shall succeed in addressing these issues and in providing the necessary answers.

The International Decade coincides with a series of comprehensive actions on indigenous issues that are being undertaken by both the Government and the interested parties in Brazil. The Decade will be an important component of the overall medium- and long-term plans and actions under way.

Brazil very warmly welcomes the launching of the Decade of the World's Indigenous People. The Decade will certainly corroborate the set of initiatives currently being undertaken in Brazil aimed at alleviating the hardships faced by the indigenous populations and at searching for specific solutions to issues related to the indigenous communities.

The Brazilian Federal Constitution is a legal landmark that provides a modern sociological and political framework for indigenous issues. The social organization, customs, language, creeds and traditions of indigenous people are fully recognized therein, as is their original right to the lands they traditionally occupy. Since our Constitution determines that it is incumbent upon the Union to demarcate, protect and ensure respect for all the indigenous populations' property, the demarcation of these lands has received a very high priority in our federal policy related to indigenous populations.

It was within this context that a presidential decree was signed in May 1994 creating an interministerial commission in charge of reviewing current projects and programmes that form the bulk of governmental indigenous policy, in light of the principles incorporated in our Federal Constitution. This decree is in line with resolution 48/163.

It should be stressed that education, a priority area of resolution 48/163, has received special attention by the Brazilian Government since the launching of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. Our goal has been to guarantee the broad access of indigenous populations to basic education; to increase the participation of indigenous representatives in the preparation and implementation of educational programmes; and to promote the use of didactic material that reflects the ethnic characteristics of each group.

In the area of health, there has been an attempt to boost the incorporation of medical techniques traditionally used by the indigenous populations. Emphasis has been placed on basic sanitation, disease and epidemiological control, immunization campaigns and training in indigenous health.

It is also worth underlining the position of the Brazilian Government in advocating the protection of the traditional knowledge of indigenous communities and their right to benefit from profits deriving from the use of that knowledge. It reflects a desire to incorporate technologies and techniques traditionally used by the indigenous communities in coping with the problems they face. Bearing this goal in mind, we wish to identify and make known the traditional and environmentally sound technologies as well as the medical knowledge of our indigenous communities.

The partnership In action that prevailed in the implementation of the International Year of the World's Indigenous People should be retained and further explored throughout the Decade. All initiatives to be carried out should be based on this notion.

We foresee the participation of representatives of indigenous communities in the discussion and preparation of projects and programmes affecting them. The participation of non-governmental organizations is also ensured by the presidential decree, which provides for coordination between the Government and the non-governmental organizations, whose involvement is necessary.

None the less, first and foremost, we should not fail to point out that the primary responsibility to adopt the required measures to protect and promote the rights of indigenous communities is incumbent on the State concerned.

As proclaimed in General Assembly resolution 48/163, the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People has been designed to be a coalition of join efforts aimed at providing some answers to the most pressing problems faced by indigenous people.

One important lesson was learned from the technical meetings held thus far on the subject of the International Year and the International Decade. The format of meetings should be re-examined. The increasing number of participants has shown both the eagerness with which indigenous people expect to be heard in the United Nations and, paradoxically, the lack of preparedness of the United Nations system to cope with this new form of participation.

Nevertheless, the positive experience of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, where indigenous participation has been welcomed as very useful, should guide us in finding a proper channel for the aspirations of indigenous people to be heard in the United Nations. As for the technical meetings format, experience has shown that additional initiatives of this nature may bear little result.

A very important aspect relating to the International Decade is the involvement of Governments. It is our understanding that contacts between United Nations representatives and indigenous populations for the purpose of achieving the goals of the International Decade, in particular the planning and implementation of projects affecting the latter, should be made through the appropriate governmental channels.

The success of the International Decade will depend to a great extent on the means available for the implementation of national development programmes directed at the improvement of the living conditions of indigenous people and their communities. For this reason, mobilization of financial resources cannot be restricted to assisting small-scale projects to be developed by indigenous groups or organizations themselves. Effective implementation of national programmes for sustainable development, especially in developing countries, to be designed in accordance with chapter 26 of Agenda 21, will require international financial cooperation as foreseen in chapter 33 of the Agenda.

Brazil has taken an active part in the activities of the International Year and in the preparations for the International Decade. We should like to renew our firm commitment to do our best to ensure the full attainment of the International Decade's goals.

The President (*interpretation from French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

We have just concluded the plenary meetings held to mark the beginning of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

I therefore declare open the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

Introduction of reports of the Fifth Committee

The President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly will now consider the reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda items 116 (a), 122 and 123.

I request Mr. Larbi Djacta, Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee, to introduce the reports of the Fifth Committee in one intervention.

Mr. Djacta (Algeria), Rapporteur of the Fifth Committee (*interpretation from French*): I have the honour to introduce to the General Assembly today three reports of the Fifth Committee on agenda items 116 (a), 122 and 123.

The first report *(A/49/755)* concerns agenda item 116 (a), "Financing of United Nations peace-keeping forces in the Middle East: United Nations Disengagement Observer Force".

In paragraph 6 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft decision that authorizes the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for the operation of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 to 31 December 1994 in the amount of $2,678,000 gross, or a net sum of $2,594,000. The draft decision was adopted by the Fifth Committee without a vote.

The second report *(A/49/756)* concerns agenda item 122, "Financing of the United Nations Protection Force".

In paragraph 6 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft decision that authorizes the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for the operation of the United Nations Protection Force for the period from 1 to 31 December 1994 in the amount of $140 million gross, or a net amount of $138,778,000. The draft decision was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

Lastly, the third report *A/49/757)* refers to agenda item 123, "Financing of the United Nations Operation in Somalia II".

In paragraph 6 of its report, the Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft decision that authorizes the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for the maintenance of the United Nations Operation in Somalia II for the period from 1 November to 31 December 1994 in the amount of $105,580,700 gross, or a net amount of $104,078,200. This draft decision was adopted by the Committee without a vote.

The President (*interpretation from French*): If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the reports of the Fifth Committee that are before the Assembly today.

It was so decided.

Agenda item 116

Financing of the United Nations peace-keeping forces in the Middle East

(a) United Nations Disengagement Observer Force: report of the Fifth Committee (A/49/755)

The President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report *(A/49/755)*. May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*interpretation from French*): We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 116 (a).

Agenda item 122

Financing of the United Nations Protection Force: report of the Fifth Committee (A/49/756)

The President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report (A/49/756).

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt this draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*interpretation from French*): We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 122.

Agenda item 123

Financing of the United Nations Operation in Somalia II: report of the Fifth Committee (A/49/757)

The President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 6 of its report (A/49/757).

May I take it that Assembly wishes to adopt this draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President (*interpretation from French*): The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 123.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.